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ARTICLE III.

CRITICAL NOTICES.

BY THE EDITOR.

1.—*Influence of the Christian Religion on Poetry,—in the Christian Spectator for June 1834. Art. III.*

The special object of this department of our work is the promotion of a pure and Christian literature, in respect to War and kindred subjects, by the application of just and Christian principles to the criticism of current publications. Still, however, as our readers will have observed, our notices have not been exclusively *critical*, in the strict sense of the term. It comes within our scope, and certainly gives us great pleasure, to mark the progress of just thinking—to signalize the manifestations of a better spirit in literature—and to make our pages a repository of the choicest things that are scattered here and there in the various works that come out, so far as they can be transferred, and as our limits will permit. That the special efforts of the lovers of peace and humanity have not been without effect, and that their principles are silently but surely and increasingly gaining ground, must, we think, be obvious to any one who is observant of our literature, particularly those departments of it which most immediately influence and reflect the tone of the public mind. The cause of universal peace is unquestionably beginning to awaken more attention and to excite more interest. A juster and more Christian style of thinking and feeling in regard to the true character of war and its concomitants, begins to manifest itself decisively in various quarters of the wide field of general literature.

In the *Christian Spectator* for June, containing the article whose title we have given above, we find the following admirable and eloquent passage. After showing the influence of Christianity upon poetry in respect to mythology and machinery, the writer goes on to observe that :

“The influence of Christianity tends to destroy another great theme of poetry. Its spirit is peace. It breathes harmony and love, and aims to bring together in appropriate union, all the wild

and jarring elements of this world; and warrants the anticipation of that blessed future, when we shall no more hear the confused noise of battle, or behold garments rolled in blood. The object of poetry is to please, to instruct, and to deepen our social interest in existence. Is war, then, a fit subject for poetry? The muse may weep,—she has often, like David, poured forth her bitter lamentations over the slain with inimitable pathos. But what theme of pleasurable poetry does the strife of war or a field of death present? We feel that there is an awful delusion on this subject, arising from early associations, and strengthened by the whole course of our education. We need only turn to Kames' *Sketches of man*, to learn the sentiments of thousands on this subject. 'War,' he says, 'is necessary for man, as the school of magnanimity, heroism, and every virtue that ennobles human nature. Without it, he would rival the hare in timidity!' We confess that we cannot read such sentiments without feeling a glow of indignation. War necessary for man! A sentiment, indeed, worthy of one who had learned his philosophy in the school of Racine and Voltaire, and which should place its author back a thousand years before the Christian era. How often, too, has the historian thrown his enchanting but deceptive colors over this subject; prostituting his noble talents, bowing before kings and warriors, while he has passed in silence some of the most splendid creations of genius! Volumes, for example, he has for the 'petty freaks and quarrels of Leicester and Essex, in the time of Elizabeth, but not a solitary page for Shakespeare.'

"To many there seems something noble in 'the pomp and circumstance of glorious war;' something sublime in the onset of battles, as the contending legions meet and dash against each other; something generous and God-like in the ardor of that chivalrous feeling which glows in the hour of danger. We need not say that this feeling is powerfully invigorated by the glowing descriptions of the historian and the poet, in their apotheosis of the warrior. To us, however, there is no poetry in such scenes. There are too many painful associations connected with them. We cannot confine our imagination to the glories that encircle the individual hero; our minds revert to the scene where his ovation was purchased,—the ensanguined plain,—and dwell upon the thousands that have fallen under his victorious car.

"Let us look at this subject in the light of sober, Christian philosophy. Let us survey thus the field of Waterloo, that 'Golgotha of nations.' There stood the mighty combatants, it is true, in awful array;—the chivalrous legions of France opposed to the more determined hosts of Britain. They meet; and when that day's work is over, what do we behold of poetry there?—a field for a mile square covered with ghastly and disfigured forms, with the mutilated, the dying and the dead. 'Melancholy and terrific sounds are heard; the shouts of victory have given place to groans of anguish,

the complaints of the vanquished, and the prayers of the dying. One is calling upon heaven to protect his children; another raves for a beloved wife; a third tenderly breathes a beloved name, consecrated only by that tie; while others deprecate their own suffering, or plead piteously for the pardon of their sins. There are those who pray ardently for death, and others who implore a few minutes more of life. Some make complaints of bodily pain, some of the gnawings of the never-dying worm; while others, as they gaze upon the fast-flowing crimson torrent, waste the brief remains of breath in moralizing upon the shortness of life, and man's careless prodigality of existence. The eyes of all wander wistfully over the scene that is fast fading from their view; and fervently do they grasp the hand of those who are mournfully bidding them a last farewell.' Surely there is something in all this too unnatural for a poetic theme! something too humiliating; something which gives man with all his boasted sensibility and elevation of soul, a superiority, on the score of ferocity, over the lion which roams through the desert, or the shark which ranges the ocean. The lion preys upon the antelope, the tiger howls in unison with his brothers of blood; but man, when about to exhibit the greatness of his soul, and furnish to after ages a theme for poetry, is aiming to destroy his fellow-man, and by the wisdom of the deep-laid plan, and the success of its execution, to gain immortal honors from the historian and the poet! Let no one talk of the 'pomp and circumstance of glorious war.' Such are the awful consequences connected with that pomp and circumstance. We might as well undertake to separate the lightning's vivid flash from the riving thunder-bolt, as to dissociate in the mind of a benevolent man, the horrors of the battle-field from the glories of the individual conqueror.

"Is war, then, the theme of pleasure—the object of poetry? We blush for poor, degraded human nature! Our hearts sicken at the very thought! Well may we exclaim, with the anointed bard, 'Lord, what is man!'

"War is not only an unfit subject for poetry, but it prostrates the spirit of song. The causes of the relapse of poetry, after Chaucer, as Campbell remarks, 'seem but too apparent in the annals of English history, which, during five reigns in the 15th century continue to display but a tissue of conspiracies, proscriptions, and bloodshed. War agitated society as one mass. There was no refuge from its Gothic irruptions,—no sanctuary of genius secure from its unhallowed influence.'

"To all these sources of poetry, we fully admit, the Bible is diametrically opposed. With war and religious persecution Christianity admits no compromise. She aims at the utter extermination of those malign influences, baneful alike to the fine arts, and to all intellectual pursuits. Her spirit is peace and good-will to man; her object the establishment of a universal sympathy for man as a social, moral, and intellectual being; a charity which will embrace

all, and give a hue of poetry to the whole life of man. For all the vicissitudes of that feeling, as Mr. Montgomery forcibly remarks, 'are pre-eminently poetical, in every change of form and color which it undergoes, being intimately associated with all that is transporting or afflictive, bright and pure, grand and terrible, peaceful, holy, and happy, in mortal existence.'"

2.—*The Earthly Triumphs of Christianity.* By Professor Bush. In *the Literary and Theological Review*, No. III., September, 1834.

THIS article is on several accounts highly interesting. It contains many novel views and striking suggestions, presented in the author's somewhat peculiar style of thinking and expression. Prof. Bush endeavors to show that Christianity is destined to break up the political distinctions of nations and States,—to overthrow civil governments,—and to bring the whole human race into one vast community. The reasons for this conclusion we have not room to give; but can only remark, that it is on this ground he predicts the cessation of War, and the ultimate prevalence of universal and permanent Peace. We place before our readers what he says on this point. We will previously observe, however, that, for ourselves, we have no faith in the peculiar ground taken by the able and excellent author. We do not believe that the final triumph of Christianity involves the dissolution of political distinctions, or the overthrow of civil governments. Nor do we believe this is necessary in order to the universal abolition of War, any more than the extinction of private property and the dissolution of the domestic relations is necessary, before Christianity can correct the evils which are occasioned by them. The right of private property, the domestic relations, and the special bonds by which individuals are thus formed into distinct families, are the *occasion* of many things contradictory to the just, the generous and peaceful spirit of the Gospel; but we do not believe that it is the intention of Providence to put an end to these evils by extinguishing, through Christianity, private property, and breaking up the distinction of families. Christianity will correct the *cause*, and not the *occasion*—the *selfishness* which perverts, and not the *institutions* which are perverted. In like manner, we believe that civil governments and distinct States will exist in the day of "the latter glory," as well as distinct families; and that the influence of Christianity will be seen in binding